

VZCZCXRO3042
OO RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHDIR RUEHKUK
DE RUEHMS #0823/01 2150954
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
O R 030955Z AUG 09
FM AMEMBASSY MUSCAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0658
INFO IRAN COLLECTIVE
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEHMS/AMEMBASSY MUSCAT
RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 MUSCAT 000823

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2019/08/03
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IR](#) [MU](#)
SUBJECT: OMAN - IRAN: WITHER THE SULTAN

REF: A. MUSCAT 633; B. MUSCAT 737; C. MUSCAT 637; D. MUSCAT 761

CLASSIFIED BY: L. Victor Hurtado, CDA, Department of State, Embassy
Muscat; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

1.(S) Summary: After days of conflicting speculation, the Sultan's previously announced, then deferred, visit to Iran is now under way. Several scenarios, each with a fact or two attached, had circulated, but Tehran is the primary destination with the possibility of additional travel. The Sultan's visit, in tandem with a large, high-level, and varied entourage, will be spun locally to enhance Oman's role as a neutral regional player seeking stability. End summary.

2.2.(S) The Sultan's visit to Iran was originally scheduled to take place June 28-30 (Ref A), soon after the Islamic Republic's elections. The trip would in any case have been a challenge, not least because it would be the Sultan's first since a state visit to his ally the Shah in 1974, but even more because of the perceived imperative of protecting the monarchy from any hint of controversy. Post-election events in Tehran have significantly compounded this conundrum, leaving the court the unenviable choice of offending the Iranians by cancelling outright or (possibly worse given the Sultan's carefully maintained low international profile) of making news by being one of the first heads of state to visit a post-election Tehran in turmoil.

3.3.(S) To date, the announced visit has officially only been postponed (Ref B) - although the postponement has been made public only via leaks by "official sources" to Gulf and Iranian media and not mentioned locally. A reliable Omani government official told Charge' on August 2 that the Sultan would "travel" later the same day, and a senior officer of the Royal Yacht Squadron confirmed that the Sultan's primary destination is Iran. Al-Sharq al-Awsat reported on August 3 that Qaboos would begin an official three-day visit to Iran on Tuesday.

4.4.(S) In any case, the Sultan's travels are now under way. The court, always discreet about the monarch's whereabouts, may wait several days before formally announcing his departure, and even then may give few details about his plans. Nonetheless, the signs are clear: The royal yacht left its usual berth late Thursday, July 30; a contact associated with the royal flight has said he will be "traveling with the boss"; in a possibly related support operation, observers reported vehicles of the Royal Court crossing into the United Arab Emirates on Saturday, August 1.

5.5.(S) A likely scenario could see the Sultan travel to the UAE and from there depart via the royal yacht to the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas, followed by inland travel on the royal flight. If he

departed as reported to us on the evening of Monday, August 2, and travels by boat, he could easily be in Bandar Abbas as early as Tuesday morning, August 4.

6.6.(S) In June, the court issued a statement that the Sultan's three-day visit would combine an official call on Ahmadinejad in Tehran with a private tour (Ref C); other senior officials, including the Supreme Leader, will likely also figure on the schedule. Contacts indicate that the private tour will feature a stop in the historical cultural center of Isfahan, in line with the Sultan's strong interest in both history and the visual arts.

7.7.(C) Previously announced as accompanying the Sultan was a very large retinue of senior officials including his chief of staff, national security advisor, the Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs (who visited Iran in July, presumably in connection with this visit), the Minister of National Economy, the Advisor for Cultural Affairs (long the court's principal connection to Tehran, but also in expectation of possible Iranian cultural assistance), The Minister of Health (with local chatter focusing on the possible role Iranian professionals might play in addressing Oman's medical deficiencies), the Minister of Commerce and Industry, The Chief Inspector of Police and Customs (to sign any so-called "security" agreement), and the Minister of Oil and Gas. Surrounding the

MUSCAT 00000823 002 OF 002

Sultan with an entourage of this magnitude has the effect of lessening the impact of his personal presence and of focusing the outcomes of the visit on the various ministries involved rather than Qaboos personally.

8.8.(S) COMMENT: Whatever is stated publicly about this visit, it will provide an opportunity for the Sultan to reinforce privately and directly with the Iranian leadership Oman's highest foreign-affairs priority, regional stability, giving him a chance to personally restate the message laid out by his Advisor for Cultural Affairs in his extremely rare mid-July (Ref D) interview that Iran "should clearly seize the approaches of the new U.S. Administration and respond positively to these policies." At the same time, Oman has also made clear that it does not desire or seek an intermediary role.

9.9.(S) COMMENT continued: Other outcomes of the visit address smuggling, energy, and cultural issues. What has been reported in the Iranian and international press as a "Security Cooperation Agreement" between Oman and Iran is in reality meant to help Oman to protect its borders by combating coastal smuggling and illegal immigration. This agreement, along with assistance on cultural/heritage issues and progress in getting much-needed natural gas (essential if the Sultanate's ambitious industrialization and diversification plans are to continue on schedule) from the Iranians, seem to be the primary public results sought by Oman in proceeding with what must be to Qaboos personally (given both his longtime friendship with the exiled Pahlavis and his personal abhorrence of publicity) a difficult visit.

1010.(S) COMMENT continued: Whatever the Sultan's travel plans, it is unlikely he will attend any of the festivities related to Ahmedinijad's inauguration. Absent the presence of other heads of state or senior Arab or European royalty, the reticent Qaboos would be loathe to feature in Iranian publicity as a high-profile presence at such events. Arriving after the inauguration would also provide the Sultan a fig leaf of cover that the post-election period of turmoil is over. More likely is the hope that by arriving in the shadow of the inauguration, he will be able to carry off a visit that, whatever hay Tehran may make of it, can be

noted, but minimized, for local consumption in the context of maintaining friendly relations with all of Oman's neighbors and enhancing regional stability. END COMMENT.

HURTADO